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ABSTRACT

In these increasingly rootless and spiritually vacant times, high school students, living through the difficult years of adolescence, have much to gain from Catholic schools, including the opportunity to learn and identify with a venerable religious and moral tradition. This 10 chapter guide outlines the various aspects of teaching religion in Catholic secondary schools. The chapters cover why teach religion; what should be taught; values; dealing with controversy; developing skills; teaching strategies; materials; assessment; occupational hazards; and a developmental perspective. A 9-item bibliography is included. (DB)

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TEACHING RELIGION IN A CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

Fr. James J. DiGiacomo, SJ

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PREFACE

The NCEA Keynote Series is made possible by a grant from the Michael J. McGivney Fund. This fund for new initiatives in Catholic education came through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus under the leadership of Virgil C. Dechant, Supreme Knight.

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Special thanks go to Ms. Eileen Torpey, the major editor of the series. The editorial committee consists of Reverend J. Stephen O'Brien, Executive Director of the Department of Chief Administrators of Catholic Education, Brother Robert Kealey, Executive Director of the Elementary School Department, and Michael J. Guerra, the Executive Director of the Secondary School Department.

INTRODUCTION

A recent work of sociology recounts an interview with a young woman named Sheila, who has actually named her religion after herself. She says:

> I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.[1]

We can respect and sympathize with people like Sheila, who try to make sense of their lives and to live responsibly. But we can also wonder if their lonely search, devoid of companions or tradition or other resources, will find any god but themselves.

Catholic schools exist to help young people find God as well as themselves. But many of the students enrolled in these schools would recognize in Sheila a kindred spirit. They nearly all believe in God. They avoid religious fanaticism like the plague. They hardly ever go to church. And their "faith" is little more than listening to their own little voice, or rather to the voices who tell them what they want to hear.

To those teachers who try to offer them something better, who teach of Jesus Christ as the presence among us of the living and true God, this book is addressed.

1. WHY TEACH RELIGION?

Americans are, by and large, a pragmatic people. We pride ourselves on "know-how." We tend to ask *how* when we should first be asking *why*. So, we may try to learn how to teach religion in a Catholic high school before taking the time to find out why we're doing it in the first place. What good reasons are there for teaching this subject to high school students, other than the fact that we have been assigned to it and need the job? Many of our students would be just as happy if we forgot the whole thing, and would not feel the least deprived. Would they, as a matter of fact, be missing something important? And if so, what?

Besides the satisfaction of knowing why we are working at something and believing in what we are doing, another good reason for working out a rationale for teaching this subject is that, in doing so, many of the how-to questions will actually be answered, for theory and practice go hand in hand.

The first reason for teaching religion in a school is that, without it, students cannot be fully-educated persons. Not everyone would admit this, of course. If schools exist only to teach students what they need to know in order to do the world's work and make a comfortable living, then not only religion, but also history and literature and languages and much of science and mathematics could be dispensed with. If we expand the purpose of schooling to include some notion of a cultivated, informed, thinking citizen, then we can make a case for including most of those subjects in the curriculum. But, what about religion? Don't many decent, hard-working, prosperous, responsible people get along quite well without it or with just a smattering?

This is a fair question that deserves a serious answer. It underlies the apathy of many a student, the lack of cooperation and support of many a parent, and the reluctance of many faculty members and administrators to involve themselves in any way in the religious formation of the student body. All these groups acknowl-

edge that religious instruction has a place in a Catholic school because it always has. But, they lack any conviction of its intrinsic importance or its academic relevance. How would one answer them?

The Examined Life

A dimension of every human being, that we deny or neglect at our peril, involves the larger questions of meaning and purpose that eventually confront anyone who refuses to settle for the unexamined life. Questions of life and death, hope and despair, meaning and absurdity, lie in wait even for the most superficial. These questions may emerge in times of crisis or failure or grief, and even in more placid periods when we permit ourselves the indulgence of reflection. Adolescence is not the first time that such questions arise and demand answers, but it may be a time of intense preoccupation with them, or at least of openness to taking them seriously and examining them with newly-developed cognitive and affective powers. Adolescence is a time ripe for deep religious and moral reflection. Even if adolescents have been well instructed as children, the answers given them in earlier years will probably not suffice much longer. These students are growing rapidly in every way, and not only the old answers, but also even the old questions fail to satisfy them. Since a child's grasp of doctrine or moral teaching would be sufficient only if children never grew up, continuing religious instruction is vital.

An even more basic reason for teaching religion is that God has called these young people to love and service and thus to the fullness of life. But, they cannot love what they do not know. Their relationship with God is meant to be more than intellectual, and it cannot be nourished in ignorance. Christians believe that God is not remote and inaccessible, but has been revealed to us. That revelation is what we try to share.

A third reason for teaching religion is the fact that Catholic students have been born not only into a nuclear family, but also into the larger community of the church. They need to hear the "story of our tribe," who these people are, what brings them together, what they believe, what they value, what they stand for, what they hope for. They need to understand something that is very difficult to grasp: that we do not make up our beliefs in the isolation of our private selves, but within the community that exists in a covenant relationship with God. They need to go beyond religious individu-

alism and find their place in a church which mediates their relationship with God.[2] This is even more difficult for adolescents, for they are at a stage in life when they are keenly aware of their individuality and may be quite uncomfortable in gatherings dominated by adults. Thus, an attitude of alienation is understandable. Religious gatherings of peers, structured and conducted by people their own age, help to bridge this gap somewhat, but getting adolescents eventually to identify with the larger community is as difficult as it is important.

Importance of Moral Guidance

An important facet of religious education is moral teaching. This is considered desirable, even by many of those to whom religious faith is of less importance. If students are to be doers as well as hearers of the word, they must examine the implications of Christ's command to us to love one another. At an age when many see moral injunctions as arbitrary constraints and a denial of their freedom, adolescents must be helped to perceive God's commands as calls to full human maturity and responsibility. They are growing up in a society which has become increasingly dangerous for them. Drugs, alcohol, and sexual misadventures, hard to escape, claim more and more victims. The less spectacular pitfalls of hedonism, dishonesty, and selfishness do damage that is less visible, but just as real. Faced with these threats to their integrity and well-being, young people need all the help they can get. Parents who make sacrifices to send their children to Catholic high schools rightly expect that teachers will make serious efforts at moral formation. Courses in morality are not the whole answer or even most of it, but they can give significant assistance.

Even when we admit that the goals of learning about faith and morals are desirable, we may question whether classroom teaching is a necessary or suitable means of achieving them. Don't most meaningful experiences take place, for most people, in church settings or in voluntary faith-sharing communities, such as the family and youth groups? Isn't it a truism that faith and values are not taught but caught? Isn't religion more a matter of the heart than of the head?

All these statements are true and should not be forgotten by classroom teachers. But, they do not change the fact that, for many young people today, the serious academic study of religion and morality is also necessary to building a solid foundation for the future. Consider, for example, those high school graduates who go on to secular universities:

> The broad range of liberal arts courses rightly exposes students to diverse accounts of the origin and function of religion in human society ... In time, Catholic students begin to experience a real tension between the sometimes over-simplified religion of their early training and the many questions, experiences and world-views they encounter on campus.
>
> The students from a fairly devout and traditional Catholic setting ... who come to the university with bits and pieces of Sunday sermons, teen-club pep talks and high school class discussions ... are ill-equipped to square their naive understanding of religion with the exacting methods of the academy. This tension does not remain purely intellectual, since the sexual freedom on campus all but assumes that they have rejected traditional Catholic teaching. The reaction to all of this may well be anger and hostility toward the church for not preparing them better for challenges to their faith.[3]

It goes without saying that one does not have to attend a secular university to encounter comparable challenges. But, it is evident that the more educated our students are destined to become, the more they need the kinds of opportunities for religious and moral reflection that can rarely be found outside the classroom.

Avoiding Anti-Intellectualism

The teacher who wants to give the kind of high school religion instruction that prepares students for the real challenges to faith in the real world, should not only be a convinced and committed follower of Jesus Christ, but also a person who takes seriously the objections to Christian belief and values that confront both young and old in the modern world. Without reducing those challenges to the intellectual realm, the teacher should appreciate the impact of those challenges on any honest, open, thinking person. The teacher should be convinced that one does not have to choose between being an educated person and being a person of faith. Having rejected the anti-intellectualism characteristic of so many religious people, teachers should approach students, confident in their ability to work through, together with them, the issues and problems which await any worshiper who does not check his or her brains at the church door. And if, like most

people, teachers feel the need to continue their own theological, as well as pedagogical training, they are willing to grow even as they lead the way.

Even for the well prepared, the obstacles to effective religious and moral teaching are many and formidable. In a pluralistic society like ours, tolerance for differing beliefs without conviction for one's own, inevitably brings with it the byproduct of religious and moral relativism, which reduces all positions to matters of opinion or arbitrary taste. Many students have already taken the view that, in matters of religion and morality, one opinion is as good as another. Hence, they believe, there are choices to be made but nothing to learn; and the quest is not for truth, but for a congenial outlook. This is an extremely difficult bias to subvert, but it is worth the effort.

If this effort does not meet with some success, many students will never get beyond the superficiality of much contemporary religion. Instead of becoming disciples of Christ, sharing his vision and values, and being committed to his goals, they will become religious consumers by default. For such people, churches are spiritual stores which offer christenings, weddings, funerals and safe schools for their children. They may demand no commitment, no influence on values and aspirations, and are entitled only to the price of the ritual or the tuition for the school.

No one can stop people from treating religion as a consumption item, but religious education has the potential to nip such attitudes in the bud by holding out the promise of something better.

Are There Any Rules?

What are the commitments that go with genuine Christian discipleship? What are the requirements for being a Catholic? Is there anything one has to do? Is there anything one is forbidden to do? What is essential to the heart of our Catholic faith, and what is negotiable? How many Catholic teenagers can even begin to answer these questions? If, as teachers, we don't help them to ask the questions, and if we don't give them some answers, many will grow up thinking of themselves as Catholic, despite neglect of prayer and the sacraments, behavior patterns that violate church doctrine, underestimating the importance of social responsibility—and see no contradiction. It's happening already.

Finally, religion teaching is a vital part of total youth ministry. A Catholic school worthy of the name is committed not only to good

education by secular standards, but also to a program of Christian formation that ministers to the religious and moral needs of its students. Such a program includes campus ministry, with opportunities for prayer, worship, sacramental celebrations, and retreats. It also embraces opportunities for service in the community, so that love of neighbor may be expressed in deeds as well as in words. Classroom religion courses, the third major element, help integrate prayer and service with the academic enterprise as a whole. In this way, religion can be seen not as an activity alongside of life, but as an integral dimension of a genuinely human existence.

Teaching religion is difficult and challenging. Before we examine strategies and tactics, let's first consider what it is that we wish to teach. What is the message we hope to share?

Summary

1. Young people need religious education to be truly educated, to respond to God's call, and to find their place in the church.

2. The serious academic study of faith and morals is needed by all.

3. An increasingly dangerous environment calls for moral guidance.

4. Teachers must be convinced and committed Christians, still growing and learning, if they are to lead their students beyond the religious and moral relativism that subverts faith and values.

5. Without a program of youth ministry that includes the study of religion, many will settle for an amorphous Catholic identity, devoid of clarity or commitment.

2. WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH?

In answering the question, "what should be taught in a high school religion curriculum?", one is tempted to draw up a list of topics. Such a list is necessary, and we will consider one. However, to think of Christian faith and morals as a catalog of items to be covered would be a mistake. To do so would contribute to the impression, shared by both adult and younger members of the church, that Christianity consists of doctrines to be believed, rules to be obeyed, and religious practices to be performed. There is some truth in that description, but it fails to reveal the living, dynamic nature of the Christian message.

The gospel, or Christian message, is more than a list of rules and regulations. It is, literally, "good news." Christians believe that the urgent questions about life are most properly asked and answered in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we learn that God is not a mere answer to the puzzle of the origin of the universe, but a loving Creator, intimately involved in the human condition. This God makes us free, gives us the power to accept or reject the divine offer of love and life, and when we reject it, offers forgiveness and salvation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. This Jesus is living and present in the church, his Body, of which he is the head and we the members.

This, in a nutshell, is the good news. If we believe, then everything we teach is informed by it; if we do not believe, then nothing we teach is informed by it. This may seem like belaboring the obvious, yet for many of our contemporaries, the religious quest has been reduced to a search for a comprehensible creed, a comfortable code, and a congenial community. But, the way Jesus himself taught shows that it is not our task to find God, but to allow God to find us; not to fashion a God who meets our expectations, but to attend to the self-revelation of a God who may surprise us, whose ways are not always our ways. This is a way of speaking about

God and religion that is foreign to many of our students, maybe even to a part of us.

From this vision and insight, certain basic themes emerge. This outline of the main elements of the Christian message is offered only as an overview of those teachings that should be included in a Catholic high school program. For a fuller and authoritative explanation of all these teachings and their interconnection, the teacher is referred to the fifth chapter of *Sharing the Light of Faith: The National Catechetical Directory.*[4] That compendium of Catholic teachings, approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, provides individual teachers and religion departments with a reliable guide to competent instruction and curriculum construction.

God. We assert that we can know of God's existence, and that our belief is based on evidence which does not force assent but makes belief reasonable. This God has been revealed as One who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; who is transcendent, distinct from creation, totally Other yet immanent, closer to us than our own selves. The God of Moses and Jesus is our Creator, Lord, and Judge, yet also our Friend, Lover, and Companion.

God Revealing. Christianity is not a philosophy, a purely human wisdom, but a response to God's gracious initiative. God reveals self and can be known in the beauty and majesty of creation, especially in the crown of that creation, men and women. A privileged source of that revelation is the Bible, which we revere as God's own word to us. This collection of sacred books is to be read with attention to the human author's perspective and intent, thus avoiding the error of fundamentalists, who by insisting on rigid, literal interpretation, distort both the human and divine message.

Jesus Christ. God so loved the world as to give the only-begotten Son, the Word Incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is fully God and fully human; he calls us to follow him through love of God and neighbor. He spells out the cost and the rewards of discipleship and shows us the way through his life, death, and resurrection.

Church. Christ visibly lives on in the church, the people of God, in whom his spirit is manifested. The church's mission is to proclaim and promote universally the reign of God, to be holy, and to be with all humanity in the quest for justice and peace. Its teaching authority comes from Christ himself. The signs of his love for us are made present in the sacraments, actions of the church which unite us with God. This church, at once holy and sinful, has evolved

through centuries of growth and decline, splendor and scandal, fidelity and betrayal, and is still evolving toward forms as yet unknown, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Eschatology. In the light of Christian hope, we see death and judgment, the promise of everlasting life and the possibility of eternal damnation. At the end of time, there will be fully realized the reign of God, which begins even now whenever people love and serve one another.

Theological Virtues. Faith is the trusting response to God's invitation, issuing in belief and commitment. *Hope* is the confident expectation that we are in the hands of God, who will be faithful. *Love* is God's unconditional regard for us, despite our failings. In turn, we are called to have the same kind of love for one another.

Sin. The rejection of grace is part of the mystery of evil. As weak, fallen creatures, we are subject to temptation and prone to sin. Our guilt can be removed through repentance and accepting divine forgiveness.

Morality. Christianity is not only a belief system, but a way of life, summed up in the two great commandments of love of God and neighbor. This love is proved less by words than by works of justice and peace. We are obliged to act in accordance with our conscience, and to form that conscience through obedience to the laws of God and the church. Moreover, we are called not only to personal integrity, but also to social justice and concern, which demand critical consciousness of institutions and social systems.

The above list, though extensive, is far from exhaustive. Many of the topics call for expanded consideration and treatment in detail. For example, teaching on sacraments would explore Baptism and the other sacraments of initiation, with special attention to the Eucharist. The consideration of the church and its members would deal with difficult contemporary issues of alienation and dissent. Under the heading of morality, various issues will come to the fore from time to time — racism, medical ethics, arms control, economic systems, international relations. A feeling for contemporary concerns is ideally balanced by attention to questions of perennial significance.

Some Hard Sayings

It is much easier to enumerate topics of a religion curriculum than to teach them. Because of their background or immaturity or immersion in the dominant culture, students may find it difficult to understand or accept some

teachings. As a result, religion teachers need a good grasp of the content, as well as an awareness of the obstacles to its communication. Listening to student queries and developing effective strategies to respond to them is critical.

For example, students may find that knowability of God is a problem, not because finding logical arguments for God's existence is difficult, but because knowledge of anything other than concrete, verifiable reality seems elusive and arbitrary. By the same token, there is a reluctance to accept any kind of truth in the Bible other than literal, historical fact. A God who makes demands or who calls for sacrifice or restraint is problematic for students who have heard only of a God who loves them just the way they are. A Jesus who is without sin and yet truly human strikes them as a contradiction. Also, a teaching church that takes stands on moral issues in the name of human dignity may be rejected for "imposing" morality or religion on others.

These and many other instances show us that more than an accurate presentation of doctrine is needed if the word is to take root. Communication skills are a high priority for anyone who would help today's youth make sense of the teaching of Christ.

Catholic, Christian, Human

A careful examination of the list of basic teachings reveals a significant and potentially helpful insight. Although some of them are distinctively Catholic, many more are held in common with some or all Christians, and many are shared with people of other religions or even of no religion. The topics concerning God, Jesus, revelation, the Bible, eschatology, the theological virtues, sin, and even much about the church are common to most Christian groups. Some of our teachings about God, revelation, and the Bible are part of the heritage we share with Judaism. Most of the moral teachings are shared not only by Christians, Jews, and other non-Christians, but also even by agnostics and secular humanists. For example, a respect for life that includes rejection of war and abortion is not peculiar to the Judaeo-Christian ethic. Neither is a commitment to justice in social, economic, and political structures. Honesty, truthfulness, respect for property and reputation, and sexual responsibility are not exclusive to those who believe in God.

Such examples can be helpful in trying to make Catholic religion instruction appealing to the young. Students from exclu-

sively Catholic backgrounds, especially in their schooling, often feel that their religious and moral education is narrowly sectarian. Religion teachers who know better and are ecumenical in their teaching approach can help their students perceive Catholic religious and moral teaching as bridges to the most responsible segments of society, rather than as walls setting them apart.

Adapting to the Young

Experience in the classroom, especially with less gifted or less motivated students, may prompt us to wonder if so much can be taught to youngsters of high school age. Isn't much of the content described above beyond the grasp of the immature? Are adolescents capable of grasping the subtle theological distinctions to which we have alluded? Isn't religion, after all, an adult enterprise?

Certainly, teachers have to make allowances for the age, the ability, and the (in)experience of those they teach. This is true of all subjects. History will be handled in different ways in sixth grade, twelfth grade, and university courses, depending on maturity, motivation, and the levels of cognitive and affective development. Tenth graders will not assimilate a play by Shakespeare in the same way that college students do. It is well to remember that the good news of Jesus Christ was first preached by barely literate blue collar workers to people of all levels of education. Christianity is not a wisdom or a philosophy, but a message that can be grasped by the most simple, as well as by the most erudite. It is not *faith* that taxes the intelligence, but *theology*, which is classically defined as "faith seeking understanding." The older we get, the more learned we become, the more sophisticated the culture in which we live, the more searching become the questions that we put to faith. Our children are growing up in a mostly urban, technocratic culture that is challenging, even when it is not hostile to a Christian world view and a Judaeo-Christian ethic that went unchallenged until fairly recently in our history. As a result, even academic underachievers are likely to put questions to religion teachers that tax their own religious self-understanding and their grasp of theology.

The tendency of adolescents to ask searching questions about religious matters creates some interesting opportunities and difficulties. The opportunities arise when the teacher, who is confident in his or her grasp of the subject, does not feel threatened by such questions and encourages rather than stifles curiosity. In fact, the

teacher's ability to provoke questions is perhaps as important as the ability to answer them. The difficulties emerge when teachers give answers that are both faithful to church teaching and in keeping with the best contemporary theological reflection. However, teachers may then find that while many teenagers ask religious questions on an adult level, they cannot grasp correspondingly adult answers. The problem is more likely to stem from immaturety than from lack of intelligence, and occurs more frequently with younger teens. A teacher will field the same questions from ninth and eleventh graders, give the same answers, and meet with strikingly different degrees of comprehension. On reflection, this should not be a surprise, but a reminder to teachers that during these years of rapid growth, there are large differences in readiness for the study of religion by older and younger adolescents.

For many students, especially the younger ones, it is not so crucial that they be able to understand the answers to their questions. What is important is that they see that the teachers know the answers. Adolescents realize that they are not adults and have a lot to learn, so they don't expect to understand everything. They can live with obscurity at this age, as long as believable adults take their questioning seriously and seem confident in their grasp of the truth. Even when the adult must admit to ignorance on some point and humbly promise to "look it up," students are not disillusioned. They don't expect infallibility in their teachers, just competence and honesty.

Finally, as in every educational situation, the teacher should know a great deal more than he or she attempts to impart. If the list of topics to be taught seems intimidating to the aspiring teacher, this is no cause for surprise or dismay. It simply points up that religion teaching is no job for well-intentioned amateurs, but for those with solid academic credentials in theology and in pastoral training. Some teachers may have to attain these qualifications through inservice enrichment, but all, even the best prepared and most experienced, find it necessary to keep up with developments in the field through reading, ongoing education, and communication with peers. The only thing worse than coming to teach unprepared is to arrive at a point where it no longer seems necessary to learn.

Summary

1. The Christian message is good news, not just a catalog of doctrines and rules.

2. A sound curriculum will include basic teachings that are at the heart of the gospel message or flow from it.

3. Communication skills are needed to inculcate many teachings that clash with contemporary prejudices.

4. Besides distinctively Catholic teachings, religious education includes many convictions and values that are shared with other Christians and those of other faiths.

5. Teaching should be adapted to the age and ability of learners.

6. Religion teachers need a solid background and a willingness to develop their skills through continuing education.

3. VALUES

When Jesus was walking the roads of Palestine and speaking in the towns, he did not come across as a philosopher speculating on the meaning of the universe, but as a man who called to decision. People who really listened to him had to make choices. They had to decide what was important to them and what could (or must) be discarded. With regard to Jesus himself and what he represented, they had to take a stand. If religious educators are to teach as Jesus did, they must do no less.

When two young men approach Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, he asks them: "What are you looking for?" (Jn.1:38). When the rich young man proposes to become a follower, he is given a choice: keep his career and the riches that go with it, or leave it all and follow Jesus (Mt.19:16-22). Another potential disciple is told that he may not have a place to lay his head: is he still interested? (Lk.9:58). Jesus' first followers "left their nets and followed him" (Mt.4:20). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the latter is condemned to hell because he chose to indulge himself rather than concern himself with the beggar at his gate (Lk.16:19-25). The twelve are told at Caesarea Philippi that they must either desert Christ or follow him to Jerusalem where suffering and death await him; indeed, they must take up their crosses and follow him, or they cannot be his disciples (Mt.16:21-25). And Pilate must decide whether to render a just verdict or enhance his career prospects by condemning an innocent man (Jn.19:12).

Most of these stark choices described in the gospel narratives were proposed to adults, not adolescents. But a faithful presentation of the message of Christ cannot ignore this aspect of his teaching. Young people can begin to examine the values by which they live, which move the people around them, and those by which Jesus lives and to which he summons his followers.

If these values coincide, the gospel will come to them as an affirmation of their aspirations and their lifestyle. If they clash, then eventually choices will have to be made. And they will know when they are doers of the word or hearers only.

Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there are our hearts also (Mt 6:21). "Treasure" is another name for our values. Young people can be helped to see where their treasure is and how it affects their hopes and dreams, their fears and forebodings. Before we compare the values inculcated by Jesus with those promoted by the dominant culture and embraced by many of our students, let us describe the universe of values in which our students live and move and have their being. What are the yearnings of the young, and where do they lead them?

Yearnings of the Young

What are young people looking for? To casual observers, it might seem that they seek the loudest music, the junkiest food, the fastest cars and the tightest jeans. But on a deeper level, they are engaged in a much more serious search. They long for friendship, acceptance, and intimacy, and with these, an indication of their own worth. They hunger for some sense of significance, some larger meaning in their lives. This impels them to look for something to believe in, and for many, the search is in religious terms. Adolescents are disposed toward idealism, but in a way that will not prevent them from achieving success. They value freedom, but this is very ambiguous since, for many of them, it means nothing more than being free from external constraints.

On the other hand, young people fear loneliness and the apparent rejection that comes with isolation. They worry about being deprived of experience, of missing out on the exciting possibilities open to people their age. The thought of being sheltered disturbs them. Most of all, they fear failure, indeed any kind of inadequacy, and especially sexual inadequacy.

These yearnings and fears produce a whole series of polarities and tensions that make teenagers very ambivalent where values are concerned. They want to be idealistic, but also "realistic." They would like to be generous, but in such a way that would also be "practical." They crave adventure, but want security. They say

people should be involved, but they avoid commitment. They yearn for intimacy, but fear to reveal themselves. They want to be free, but not responsible. They wish to be accepted, but often doubt their own worth and hence cannot accept themselves. They pay lip service to individuality, even as they try desperately to blend in. They admire integrity, but fear to pay the price.

These tensions and contradictions often produce growth-inhibiting, even destructive behaviors. Thus the need for acceptance makes adolescents vulnerable to peer pressure, which can involve them with drugs and alcohol. The fear of being abandoned by their peers, the need for assurance of their normalcy and the desire to prove themselves lead to premature sexual intimacy, with all the social problems that flow therefrom. They become vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation — by manipulative advertising, by the multibillion dollar sex industry, by the cults that practice seduction, and by the ubiquitous forces of consumerism. For the most part, they are quite unaware of how they are manipulated, how their freedom is limited by others besides parents, teachers and religious leaders. Young people need help to see how these forces work and then help to make choices that are genuinely free.

The Clash of Values

A close look at some values of the surrounding culture reveals a clash between them and some basic Christian perspectives. Consider, for example, what James Fowler calls the dominant myth of consumer culture: that you should experience whatever you desire, own everything you can, and relate intimately with whomever you wish.[5] This myth is all the more powerful for never being explicitly articulated, but lurking under the surface of our consciousness and implicit in countless messages that reach us through the media of popular culture. This taken-for-granted philosophy oils the wheels of commerce and legitimizes much behavior which would otherwise be considered irresponsible. Most of the goals of consumerism are neither good nor bad in themselves. But when they become absolutized, as they are in the minds of many of our students, they clash with fundamental Christian values.

Consumer Values	*Christian Values*
Getting	The worth of a person cannot be measured
Owning	by the money or things he/she owns
Enjoying	
Producing	Frugality is to be preferred to
Competing	conspicuous consumption
winning	
...which put a	we are responsible for one another
premium on	Justice and honesty are not to be
Aggressiveness	compromised in the struggle for
Self-satisfaction	status and security
Status	
Security	

As long as consumer values are relativized and subordinated to Christian standards, they need pose no threat to those who profess to follow Christ. Religion teachers should discourage students from making false dichotomies, as if being a Christian forbade us to be ambitious or industrious or to enjoy the fruits of our honest toil. We all know wealthy, ambitious, influential people who make their money honestly, spend it responsibly, share it with those in need, and are intent on enriching the wider community, as well as themselves. But, we do well to remember that Jesus said that wealth can be a great temptation, and that it can be hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God (Mt.19:23).

Why is this? Because power, prestige, possessions and pleasure, while not bad in themselves, become so when they constitute one's identity. When we remember all the well-to-do, powerful people, in business and in public life, whose careers have been ruined and who have gone to prison for trying to make just another hundred thousand or a million dollars, Jesus' remarks about the danger of riches don't sound so far-fetched. Moreover, he was probably talking not just about those who already posses riches, but also about those who are willing to sacrifice any principle to gain and hang on to wealth. In a consumer culture, where, for example, an automobile commercial tells us, "You are what you drive," such warnings are quite up-to-date.

A failure to perceive value conflicts and tensions not only puts young people at personal risk, but also limits their ability to respond to calls for social justice. There are always adults who manage to preserve their individual integrity and take their religious obligations seriously, but who are incapable of critiquing the political, economic,

and social arrangements that contribute to human damage on a broad scale. Values education of the type we are describing is needed not only to protect individuals from corruption, but also to enable them to work for justice in the wider community.

More than Possessions Involved

As Fowler points out in his description of consumer culture, more than material possessions is involved. The message makers assure us that we have a right to experience anything we desire and to relate intimately with whomever we wish, as long as nobody gets hurt and nobody else's freedom is interfered with. We recognize here our old friend "individualism" in another form. Among adolescents, this is called freedom; to adults who have bought uncritically into the dominant culture, it is called privacy. For persons of this mentality, putting moral limits on what people may experience, in sexual and other matters, is to interfere with their "freedom of choice."

The attitude that no one or nothing may put limits on us, that we have a right to anything we want and can afford because we owe it to ourselves, can lead to a heedless self-indulgence that destroys us even as we ride roughshod over the rights and feelings of others. It is not an overstatement to say that some of the young people before us are already well on their way to such a lifestyle and are held back not by guilt, but by lack of opportunity. It relates to the fear of missing out, of being left behind by peers in the race for excitement and the bogus maturity that comes with premature intimacy. To be inexperienced is to be indicted, to be innocent is to be condemned. This accounts, to some extent, for the deep-seated hostility to a church that professes to put moral limits on behavior that the wider society either condones or ignores.

For us to condemn such a value system is futile unless we replace it with a different set of values. Jesus challenges us to take a completely different approach to life. He says that happiness lies not in making the world revolve around one's desires and self-satisfaction, but in loving others, in respecting and caring for them, in serving them, even in dying for them. He asserts, contrary to the accepted wisdom of every age, that it is better to give than to receive; that if we cling too hard to life we will lose it, but if we are ready to give it up, we can save it. Over and over again, he assures us that the heedless piling up of possessions will only make us poor, and that the very acts of generosity that we fear to do will, in the end, make us rich.

The value system offered by Jesus is full of paradox, but not incomprehensible and not foreign to our experience. Young people who are afraid to deny themselves anything admit to an admiration of Jesus and those who try to live his way. And religion teachers can show teenagers that even in their limited experience, they have known a deeper kind of satisfaction in doing the honest, the generous, the loving thing—in sacrificing immediate gratification for a higher goal. This kind of reflection is important for teenagers, who are at an age when ambitions are taking shape, choices are being made, and habits are being formed. Otherwise, they may follow the line of least resistance and settle uncritically for a sterile way of life that promises unlimited gratification and leaves them empty and disillusioned. If religion teachers don't at least try to encourage reflection on Jesus' values, students may remain under the impression that being Christian means just being nice and leaving other people alone.

This kind of values education would be useful, even if we were not engaged in religious instruction. All young people, no matter what their religious traditions, are engaged in what Erik Erikson calls "the trying on of identities." Teachers serve students well when they help them to sort the wheat from the chaff in the bewildering variety of choices confronting them. Teachers cannot make choices for students, but they can structure learning situations, which help them reflect and discriminate and freely choose, instead of mindlessly succumbing to manipulation. Such education is not limiting, but liberating. It is the way Jesus himself did it. He was a teacher, who constantly reminded his listeners that they were free, that they could choose, and that the responsibility for their lives was their own. He never absolutized freedom and never said that it did not matter what they chose. He made it clear that everything was at stake in the way they used their freedom: good choices would enrich them beyond their wildest dreams, and bad choices could lead to tragedy. This is just as true today as it was then. Because most students will be surprised to hear it—they think that Jesus is a nice man who likes everybody and speaks in comforting generalities about a God who just wants us to feel good about ourselves—the religion teacher has an excellent opportunity to shake them up.

Summary

1. Jesus is not a philosopher, but a man who calls us to decision.

2. The hopes and fears of young people influence their values and their life choices.

3. Christian values frequently clash with accepted standards and goals.

4. Jesus' value system is challenging and liberating and involves us in a game played for high stakes. Sound religious education gives students a chance to win.

4. DEALING WITH CONTROVERSY

There are some issues in today's church that touch adult Catholics directly, but are so fundamental and so pervasive that they also have an impact on religious education of the young. One of these has several faces, all of them different aspects of the same problem. Sometimes it is about faith and doctrine: What is orthodox teaching? May theologians disagree? To whom should we listen? Sometimes it is about morality: What is the authority of the magisterium? What are the rights of conscience? Can Catholics legitimately dissent? Whatever form the controversy takes, it is about a troublesome, but unavoidable issue: Is there just one way, or are there many ways, of being Catholic? Is there a place for responsible dissent, and if so, are there any limits? Do loyalty and obedience cancel out freedom and responsibility, or can they somehow be reconciled in the life of a Catholic? Whether or not a religion teacher treats these issues explicitly in class, the stance that he or she takes will inevitably influence both the content and the style of teaching.

The scriptures, however, call all Christians to the "obedience of faith" Romans 1:6). In other words, God's will and word should be the dominant factors in our search for truth. This attitude of humble and submissive faith should be shared with our students as a basic Christian disposition. This is not always easy in a culture where the desires of the individual often seem to be the principal norm of belief and conduct.

As religion teachers, we must be clear in our own minds where we stand on these issues. Although some may still be trying to sort things out, most of us have probably taken a position and once we have it clarified, we should ask what we want for our students. Do we want to inculcate our own views, or should we simply set out to clarify the issues that divide Catholics and leave it to students to make their own choices? Or, would we rather simply avoid the

questions altogether because they are too divisive and create no-win teaching situations? These are hot potatoes, and if we try to handle them, we run the risk of getting burned. Maybe we should just drop them and stick to the basics?

Although teachers should, as a general rule, avoid projecting their own adult problems on young people, thus needlessly complicating their lives, it is probably impossible and maybe undesirable to shelter them completely from those matters. Education should prepare children for the real world, and the church in which these young people are growing up is one in which good, intelligent, sincere people disagree about the requirements for membership in good standing. Religion teachers can help adolescents to understand what adults are debating and offer some help as they deal with their own feelings and arrive at their own conclusions.

Where To Begin?

As a starting point, students should be taught, clearly and unambiguously, the official church positions on matters of faith and morals. The language of these pronouncements of the magisterium will often need clarification and adaptation to make them more understandable to students. Many Catholics feel strongly that this is all they need to know, and that any dissenting opinions are irrelevant. Some students will feel the same way, and will be quite content with such a presentation.

On the other hand, some students will not be so easily satisfied. They may find the teaching objectionable or unconvincing. They may be aware that other Catholics, some of them respected for their learning and deeply involved in the life of the church, share their disagreement. The teacher should be able to analyze, with the students, the sources of controversy. What premises are the disputants arguing from? Are they defending different values? Do they work from different models of church? What are the arguments from scripture and tradition that they make for their respective positions? Does this dispute touch on the heart of the Christian message, or does it concern less important matters, where pluralism can be more easily accepted? How much is at stake?

Even without getting very deeply into the subject, the teacher will soon become aware of an almost intractable problem underlying these controversies. Many Catholics, both young and old, believe that once church authorities have spoken on a subject, debates about

evidence or the validity of arguments supporting the pronouncement are out of place. What counts for them is not the reasons adduced, but the pronouncement itself, which is perceived as validated by divinely-guaranteed authority. Those who take this position are at odds with many fellow Catholics who are equally firmly convinced that, while they should attend to church teaching with religious respect, they may responsibly withhold assent, if after prayer and study, they find the supporting arguments unconvincing and if other committed and involved Catholics of acknowledged theological competence share their reservations. Here are two very different mentalities which will probably be at odds until about two hours after the Second Coming. What shall we say about them to our students?

Those who instruct others in the faith must be careful, as noted above, to teach the authentic message of the church. In doing so, differences and dissent should be handled with Christian charity. There is no need to impugn the sincerity or intelligence of others. In rejecting any opinion, teachers should not reject the persons holding it. In this way, students can learn how to respect others and the church can be built up as a community of love. Students also should be helped to see that there are limits to any dissent or pluralism and that it is the right and responsibility of the "authentic teachers" (the pope and the bishops) to preserve the unity of the church in truth. Sometimes this will regrettably require disciplinary decisions, as in the cases of Lefebvre or Kung.

By observing the law of love in treating disputes within our community, teachers can speak honestly and forthrightly about their own convictions. While students have a right to know where teachers stand, opinions should not be forced on them. Teachers do not have to be bland or neutral in a wishy-washy way, but they should respect students' freedom of conscience. Our classrooms, and indeed our schools, should be stimulating, exciting places where ideas clash, values collide, and people can fight for their beliefs in a spirit of mutual respect. "Children and young people have a right to be encouraged to weigh moral values with an upright conscience and to embrace them by personal choice."[6]

Catholic Tradition

Up to now, we have dealt mostly with attitudes and the manner in which teachers should try to deal with controversy. To help in this difficult area, there are some specific points of Catholic tradition to be kept in mind.

The difference between faith and theology. Doctrines are truths which we believe by faith and which are proposed, not as proven by reason, but as revealed truths to be accepted on God's word. Theology, on the other hand, is faith seeking understanding. Thus, for example, the divinity of Christ is a belief at the heart of our religion. It is a revealed truth that cannot be proven by reason; it can only be rejected or freely accepted in faith. Theology can try to understand a little better, but incompletely, what is involved in this belief. Hence a subject of free theological inquiry is the human consciousness of Christ. When did he know who he was? Were future events known by him by virtue of his divine intellect, or did he have to learn things the way we do? Theologians disagree in their answers to these questions, and no church pronouncement has ever tried to close the controversy, for what is involved here is not faith, but theology.

Another example is the doctrine of redemption: that Jesus saves us by his death and resurrection. The acceptance in faith of this good news is at the heart of the gospel. But, there are many theologies of redemption, many theories of how his saving action delivers us and what form this salvation will take. Teachers should be clear in their own minds when they are dealing with articles of faith and when they are dealing with theology, and they should be ready to make the distinction clear to their students.

The limits of infallibility. Students often have a very simplistic notion of the doctrines of ecclesial and papal infallibility and their relevance to church teaching and dissent. They think that if the pope is infallible, then he cannot make a mistake; so how could a Catholic disagree with anything he says? To clear up this misapprehension, the very narrow limits of the doctrine of infallibility should be explained. Only a few doctrines have been infallibly promulgated ***ex cathedra***, and no moral teaching has ever been communicated in this way. So, infallibility is nearly always irrelevant to disputes among Catholics. Rather, the argument is about ordinary, non-infallible, authoritative teaching. What is a Catholic's appropriate response?

The Second Vatican Council tells us that the teaching function of the church, exercised by the pope and bishops, is a gift of the Holy Spirit and that their teaching therefore deserves "loyal submission," even when it is not specifically proposed as infallible [Const. on Church, #25]. Students coming from a democratic and pluralistic tradition sholud be helped to understand the theological and spiritual realities that are the foundation of the church's teaching authority.

The formation of conscience. It is the constant teaching of the church that a person is morally obliged to follow his or her conscience, even when that conscience is erroneous. This is simply another way of saying that God wants us to act with integrity, i.e., to act sincerely in accordance with our deepest convictions. Thus, we will be judged not on whether we did what was right, but on whether we did what we honestly thought was right. Philosophers call this the distinction between objective and subjective morality.

In a relativistic and individualistic culture like ours, this can easily be misinterpreted as a license to do whatever we please, since each of us makes our own morality anyway. This is not at all what it means. Remember the plaintive question of Charlie Brown in "Peanuts"— "How can our baseball team lose all the time, when we're so sincere?" The Christian is obliged to seek the truth and to act in accordance with it. And church teaching is a great gift of God because it helps us to find that truth. This is why Catholics are admonished to listen reverently to those who exercise the teaching office in the church. On the other hand, obedience to church authority can never totally substitute for personal reflection and responsibility in making decisions concerning faith and morals. How to maintain these two values — reverence for authority and adult responsibility — is what most controversy in the church is all about.

Summary

1. Controversies among adult Catholics have an impact on what and how we teach.

2. Students should be taught official church doctrine, and this should be clearly distinguished from theological interpretations.

3. In treating disagreements among Catholics, charity as well as honesty should be maintained.

4. To achieve these goals, it will help to keep in mind the distinction between faith and theology, the limits of infallibility, and the obligation to form and follow a right conscience.

5. DEVELOPING SKILLS

School should be more than a place where youngsters have to hear what adults think they ought to know. Somewhere along the line, students must cease to be passive listeners and become active learners. And, they must develop certain skills that have to do with learning itself and then they must be able to put to work what they have absorbed. This is certainly true of religious learning, where the goal is that they be "not only hearers of the word, but doers as well" (Jas.1:22).

Developing these skills can be considered in three areas: 1) classroom learning; 2) religious activity; and 3) moral analysis.

Classroom Learning Skills

Some of the skills that we wish to promote are helpful in learning any discipline, not just religion; others are proper to the study of this subject. One of the former is ***listening***. This is so basic that one may well wonder if it can be taught. But, teachers can help by developing attention-getting techniques, enlisting the curiosity of the student, and checking from time to time to see if attention has waned. To avoid the situation described in Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence" — "People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening" — the teacher should elicit feedback to indicate how well pupils have heard what was said.

The ability to listen is an important part of ***discussion*** skills as well. In order to interact constructively with their peers, students must be willing not only to speak, but also to let others speak and to grant them attention. Some personalities manage this quite well; they are good listeners and are stimulated by give-and-take. Others tend to compete for the attention of teacher and classmates and try to monopolize it. A good discussion leader can encourage these

aggressive non-listeners to respect the opinions of others and their right to express them, and to try to learn from their peers.

The kind of active listening we are describing involves both ***openness*** and ***critical thinking***. An active listener is ready to learn from others, to re-examine positions in a spirit of dialogue rather than debate. Students who possess this skill engage in a discussion not to win an argument, but to emerge more enlightened. If they combine this approach with a critical sense, they can be discriminating in how they appropriate new ideas and confirm or discard old ones. Thus they avoid the extremes of rigidity and gullibility.

These kinds of dialogue are rare even among adults when religion and morality are the subjects of discourse; but young people can learn to be so engaged, especially if their teachers demonstrate these behaviors in their teaching styles.

A skill proper to religious education concerns ***reading sacred scripture***. The sacred writings, which hold a very special place in the lives of Christians and Jews, call for a difficult combination of skills in the reader. Most important is an attitude of reverence for God's word; this cannot be taught, but can be encouraged and modeled. The ability to respect the author's intent and seek his meaning beneath literary forms that are sometimes unfamiliar to us and potentially misleading also is important. Fundamentalists of all stripes stumble here, insisting on taking every passage literally, forcing on them meanings foreign to both the human and divine authors. By ignoring evidence and eschewing logic, they hope to save their faith by sacrificing their intelligence. This is a temptation for many, including adolescents who are uncomfortable with ambiguity and complexity and prefer the delusory security of simplistic solutions.

Those who avoid the trap of literalism may fall prey to the opposite error and conclude that the Bible is nothing but "a bunch of stories that aren't true." Their notion of truth is limited to concrete, verifiable facts and statements that can be taken literally. Thus, when it is shown that the world could not have been made in six days, they conclude that the creation account in Genesis is simply untrue. Myths, like the story of the Fall and of Jonah, are dismissed as fables instead of statements of profound abstract truths clothed in stories. The teacher should help students to expand their notion of truth and to appreciate the Bible's rich variety of forms of expression.

Biblical study is just one of many instances where teacher and students can be tempted to take refuge in anti-intellectualism. This

phenomenon is sometimes due to laziness, but more often it stems from a desire to protect religion and thus it betrays a repressed fear that what we profess by faith cannot stand up to serious examination. Therefore, what looks like faith is exposed as threadbare defensiveness. The students' whole school experience should militate against this kind of unconscious intellectual dishonesty; the religion class, at any rate, should not encourage it. Otherwise, the suspicion of many bright youngsters will be confirmed — that religion is a refuge for the timid of mind and the faint of heart. In later years, religion class ought to be remembered not as a time of indoctrination where questioning was discouraged and dishonest short cuts were the order of the day, but as a learning experience every bit as respectable as the most rigorous courses offered in other subjects. Such a memory will not solve all of their faith problems, but at least it will not add to them.

Religious Activity Skills

Religious learning is sterile if it does not result in religious activity. Without prayer and worship and service, the intellectual study of religion is nothing more than a "head trip." For thought to result in action, some basic skills are needed.

Like all relationships, our relationship with God must be nourished by communication, which in this case is called ***prayer***. Some children arrive at adolescence with some prayers in their memory bank, but not much idea of how to converse with God. They are likely to resist saying memorized prayers at set times. Spontaneity, to youngsters, is the only mark of authenticity, and anything that smacks of routine seems phony. Trying to change this narrow view can be an exercise in futility. It is more effective to teach students other ways to pray, how to listen and how to talk to God.

Skills of ***celebration*** also are very important. Participation in the liturgy amounts to more than just knowing how to respond, when to sit and stand, and how to receive communion. It means knowing how to be quiet and attentive to God's presence, how to listen actively to the readings, how to be a participant rather than a passive spectator. Preparing the celebration, choosing a theme and readings and hymns, composing petitions for the prayer of the faithful, doing the actual reading, and joining in the singing, are all ways of getting students involved in the service. While these are not classroom activities as such, the teacher can use occasions outside of class time

and on retreats to show students the way and offer opportunities for actual experience.

Although these skills of worship are developed outside the classroom, the religion teacher also can contribute by helping students bring positive attitudes to the celebration. Many young people today have an impoverished understanding of sacraments and a rather fragile spirituality built on narrow expectations. This shows up in both negative and positive ways. On the negative side, students complain that liturgical celebrations are "boring" and that they "get nothing out of them." Positively, students esteem those celebrations during which they feel affirmed as individuals and as groups, when community is experienced in the honest expression of togetherness and friendship. While these are desirable outcomes, the weakness is that worship is valued exclusively for its immediate, emotional results; if students do not feel palpably better at the time, then the sacrament is seen as worthless. We are touching here on one of the most serious problems in the religious lives of Catholics, young and old: neglect of the Eucharist. There is no quick or easy solution, but religion teachers should try to correct and broaden their students' understanding and expectations in this regard.

One way to do this is to draw parallels with their experience in school. Although class periods and school days do have their moments of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, most days and weeks are rather routine, even humdrum or boring. Even the best students rarely feel smarter at 3 o'clock than they did at 9, and they seldom display signs of being better educated on Friday afternoon than they were on the previous Monday morning. And yet, over the course of a school year, for those who persist and work at their lessons through the highs and lows, some remarkable things happen: they grow, they mature, they develop skills. Somehow, between September and May, in ways rarely visible to the naked eye at the time, students get educated! That is how God works within us — slowly and imperceptibly, provided we persevere in our efforts to cooperate with divine grace and not insist on immediate satisfaction.

These religious activity skills are not beyond the reach of our students, but they do not come easily to most of them. They are growing up in a culture that insists on constant stimulation, shortens spans of concentration, and promises immediate satisfaction or your money back. On the other hand, a genuine relationship with God demands some quiet, a capacity for reverence and an openness to grace, plus a willingness to persevere without the reward of instant results. Like all worthwhile things, religious growth takes time and

effort. Many teenagers will not know this unless some adult tells them and is willing to help them experience it.

Moral Analytical Skills

The question of how to help students develop skills in moral decision-making brings to mind a well-known saying about helping the poor: "Give a hungry man a fish, and he will eat today; teach him how to fish, and he will feed himself thereafter." Although one of the duties of religious educators is to tell their students, in a forthright manner, that some things are right and some things are wrong, moral instruction has to go much further than that. It must help young people develop their own ability to analyze moral issues, perceive the values at stake, and make responsible judgments and decisions.

We have already alluded to one of the foremost obstacles to this kind of moral analysis, the pervasive relativism that reduces all ethical questions to matters of taste. To persons of this mentality, "any intrusion of 'oughts' or 'shoulds' ... is rejected as an intrusion of external and coercive authoritarianism."[7] One way to attack this prejudice is by inducing cognitive dissonance, i.e., drawing from the student's position logical conclusions which he or she finds unacceptable. Thus the moral relativist who is consistent cannot condemn any conduct, no matter how heinous. Thieves cannot be condemned for stealing, nor murderers for murder, nor rapists for rape, etc., because from their point of view the conduct is right. A classic example of such absurdity is the insistence of pro-abortionists on referring to themselves as "pro-choice," implying that all choices are right. This kind of ethical illiteracy, which stems from the untrammeled individualism, characteristic of much of our society, in some cases seems to be intractable. However, students, who follow this line of thinking, should at least be put on the defensive, if they cannot immediately be disabused.

Not all obstacles to moral reasoning are sociological. Some come from within the person and have their roots in the cognitive and affective evolution that is underway. For some teenagers, vestiges of childhood's pre-moral level of judgment, which perceives ethical categories as emanating from some purely arbitrary authority still remain. To this way of thinking, certain kinds of activity are "right" or "wrong" simply because some authority (parent, teacher, ruler, God) has so decreed. Students should be shown that morality

exists not in the will of the lawgiver (voluntarism), but in reality itself (realism). Thus, stealing is not wrong because God forbids it or because it is against civil law. Just the opposite is the case: God forbids stealing and civil law punishes it because it is wrong; i.e., it violates the right of persons to their property.

The same goes for other ethical imperatives. If premarital intercourse is wrong, it is not because God expressly forbids it, but because it violates and damages persons, and hence is forbidden by a God who commands us to love and not hurt one another. By the same token, making abortion legal cannot make it right, just as our country's laws, which once permitted slavery and racial discrimination, could not change those institutions' profoundly immoral character. These may seem like very obvious lines of reasoning, but they involve a logic that does not come easily for some adults and for many youngsters. Principled reasoning is a skill that depends on a certain level of cognitive development, and the latter takes place in different people at various speeds. One of the great privileges of teaching is the opportunity to help that development take place. But in addition to clear thinking and exposition on the teacher's part, great patience is required to help students follow the reasoning and to employ and express the reasoning on their own. And the teacher should not be surprised if some are not yet ready to follow or master the process. For it is not just intelligence, but also maturity that is involved here, and growth can seldom be hurried.

Related to teenagers' limited capacity for principled thinking is the phenomenon called tribalism. This shortcoming, not limited to adolescents, but to be expected at their stage of growth, makes them sensitive to the rights and needs only of those with whom they are personally familiar and who are considered as belonging to their group. Thus, when asked what they would do if they found a wallet, many teenagers say that unless it belonged to a friend or someone they knew, they would keep it. What seems like insensitivity towards the rights of others may be a function of immaturity: adolescents' cognitive limitations make it difficult for them to relate to persons with whom they have had no personal contact. They can be helped to get beyond this level of moral reasoning. One way is to have them put themselves in the place of someone whose rights are violated by a stranger. Strategies like this can create cognitive or affective dissonance, so that a position previously espoused becomes unsatisfactory, thus encouraging movement to higher levels.

The goal is to encourage and develop the ability to carry through on a line of reasoning, to see the implications of a moral

position, and to take a stand, based on personal conviction. Even as allowances are made for teenagers' limited capacities, this is a desirable goal, since it partly describes a mature person who can engage in sophisticated moral investigation and dialogue. An important skill is the ability to analyze issues, to perceive what values are at stake, and thus to see "where people are coming from" — both themselves and others — in terms of premises and commitments.

The question of values takes us beyond the realm of the cognitive. Knowledge is not virtue, and high intelligence does not guarantee integrity. We enter the realm of the affective when we ask what people prize, what they are committed to, what they are about — in a word, their values.

Summary

1. Among the skills that contribute to religious learning and development are the ability to listen and to discuss, and a capacity for openness and critical thinking. Mastery of the proper ways to read scripture is of special importance for the religious learner.

2. Religious learning should result in religious activity such as prayer and worship. Sacramental celebrations present young people with special problems that must be addressed.

3. Within the limits of their maturity and their cognitive and affective development, adolescents should acquire skills of moral analysis, judgment, and decision-making.

6. TEACHING STRATEGIES

Teaching is like cooking spaghetti. We bring water to a boil, put in the spaghetti, take it out when it's cooked, and add sauce and seasoning to taste. It's simple, but some people's spaghetti tastes a lot better than others'.

The spaghetti is what we want to teach — the content, the information, the ideas, the skills. But first, we have to boil the water by making students curious and interested. Once the water comes to a boil, we must make sure we have enough spaghetti to stick to their ribs; otherwise we will be great motivators with nothing much to say, master chefs who arouse our guests' appetites and then send them home hungry. The pasta must be neither underdone nor overdone: ***al dente*** is preferred by gourmets, since it is not flabby and needs vigorous chewing. Finally, the sauce must be chosen with care, mixed with discretion, and suited to individual tastes. And, if we don't put too much on their plates, they may even come back for seconds.

Boiling the Water

Occasionally, a topic is of such immediate interest to students that the teacher doesn't have to arouse their curiosity; the water is already boiling. Most of the time, however, their interest cannot be presumed and must be elicited. There are many ways of doing this: a provocative news item; an open-ended film that calls for closure; the words of a popular song; a poem; a photograph; a brief story; an excerpt from an article or a book; or the results of a survey on a controversial issue, to name just a few. The French have a word for it — ***accrochage,*** a device to catch pupils' attention and stimulate their participation.

Choosing the *accrochage* calls for some imagination and ingenuity on the teacher's part. The possibilities are endless, but generally, the best ones come from the everyday world of events and experience that do not look conventionally religious and which are eye-catching and interesting.

The rule of motivate-before-teaching has a very broad application. It is valid not only for specific topics or lessons, but also for religion teaching in general and indeed, for religious ministry as a whole. In a culture strongly influenced by secularism, relativisim, and consumerism, all those engaged in religious ministry, including religion teachers, must confront the fact that they are offering a product for which many prospective customers feel no need. The teacher knows students need it, but *they* don't. To the student whose world of concerns is limited to the pragmatic and the immediate, God-talk seems esoteric and irrelevant. To the student who has swallowed the popular prejudice that all morality is relative, questions of right and wrong are unimportant because they lead nowhere. To the student whose sole ambition in life is to acquire and consume, it is not clear that religion is about anything important. For all these people, God is like the Loch Ness monster — his existence or non-existence is a matter of mild curiosity, but no anxiety. Jesus offers the answers to all kinds of questions that they have never asked, and fulfillment of desires that they do not feel.

St. Augustine says our hearts are restless until they rest in God. In classrooms, we meet many young people who look restless, but not *that* way. Nevertheless there is, even among the most shallow, a need for meaning and a sense of personal significance. To resurrect these dormant stirrings and to open up young minds and hearts to possibilities undreamt of in the plastic paradise is the challenge that faces teachers.

To effectively reach students in a religion class, the teacher must get the water boiling. In a school setting, the academically-ambitious may do what the teacher expects to get a good mark, but the others will yawn and scratch and grumble the year away. In either case, the teacher touches neither their minds nor their hearts. But, the teacher who can pierce students' crust of superficiality and arouse the hunger and idealism that lie just beneath the surface, will see that wonderful things can happen.

Putting in the Spaghetti

Once the water comes to a boil, the teacher mustn't forget to put in the pasta. That may seem too obvious to be worth saying, but it isn't. A teacher can become so skilled at arousing curiosity and stimulating discussion that he or she could get lost in the process and forget to communicate the content. If this happens often enough, students may look back on the year as a time of interesting discussions and clashes of opinions, when nothing was decided. So, it's important to keep the goal of religious instruction in mind — developing students who are well informed and skilled in making judgments and decisions.

The spaghetti itself, the content, takes many different forms. It may be the teaching of Jesus on some subject, or the authoritative church formulation of a doctrine, or a value judgment, or the application of a moral principle to some issue. It could be some point of fact in church history or the interpretation of a passage in scripture. Where do these topics come from? They are determined, of course, by the syllabus outlined in Chapter 2. The topics should be introduced and illustrated, not just from the Bible and official church documents, but also from a variety of sources, including the inner world of the teen, the small world of teens together, the outside world of ordinary people, as well as events featuring famous people and global issues. These events and people should be drawn from the present as well as the past. Thus the proper impression may be communicated — that religion is about *all* of life, not just one or two hermetically-sealed compartments.

The means of presentation should vary with the nature of the objective. Sometimes, it depends simply on clear exposition by the teacher. More often, and preferably, it comes out of presentation, investigation, and discussion. If the students themselves can be helped to arrive at the content through individual or cooperative effort, the lesson is more likely to be valued and retained. When they know not only the right answer, but also why it is right and how it was reached, they are not just giving back material to the teacher, but are achieving learning mastery.

The distinction between content and process should not be maintained too rigidly. What students learn is often a function of how it is learned. This is true in the study of morality, where learning how to analyze issues and apply principles to cases is often as important as arriving at the right conclusions themselves.

Sauce and Seasoning

For the teacher, there is no substitute for knowing the subject, being disciplined and well organized, and clearly and efficiently presenting a lesson. But when really good teaching takes place, a classroom has something more: a sense of anticipation, occasional excitement, a bit of color, maybe some humor. This is the seasoning that makes the spaghetti something special, and the variations are as numerous as personalities of teachers. Students enjoy these kinds of classes because they don't expect to be bored; they might be surprised, and the learning will be relatively painless and perhaps even enjoyable. These special teachers enjoy what they're doing, and it rubs off on their pupils. They demand hard work, but try not to turn it into drudgery. They know how to be serious and still get a laugh, even at their own expense. They are long on imagination, talk in pictures, think unconventionally, and are not totally predictable. Not everyone has the personality to be like this, but even a little goes a long way.

Those teachers who feel that they are not very imaginative and cannot be colorful or unpredictable, can aim for classes that are well-paced, include a variety of activities, involve as many students as possible, and stress learning through discovery. Such tactics can turn fairly prosaic personalities into teachers who are interesting because their classes are interesting.

As teachers try to be not only orthodox and organized, but also attention-getting and interesting, it may help to consider one positive aspect of our subject. Religion is intrinsically interesting, even fascinating. Questions of life and death, the ***mysterium tremendum et fascinans*** that Rudolf Otto calls the idea of the holy, the age-old, recurring story of people's search for meaning at the center of life, issues of right and wrong, questions of value and significance — how could these be boring? To be sure, secularism and consumerism can somewhat dull students' capacity for religious and moral concern, but surely they are too young to be utterly impervious to stimulation. If students are bored, some of the fault may lie with their teachers, as well as with themselves. It certainly isn't due to the subject. Maybe we're serving spaghetti without sauce or seasoning.

What are some strategies that can turn class periods into experiences that are interesting as well as organized, that not only "cover the matter," but also stimulate and motivate students to

achievement? And what educational philosophies underlie these approaches?

No More Parades

Catholics of the future need instruction that will prepare them for a more individualized approach to religious concerns. Individualism is a fact of life on the religious scene, and will be with us for the foreseeable future. There are weaknesses in this approach, most notably in the neglect of tradition and community. But, for better or for worse, most adults are going to take responsibility for their own religious beliefs and allegiances. Today's teenagers, in their later years, should remember their religion classes not as experiences of indoctrination, but as a time of discovery, of interaction, of group and individual reflection.

This has implications for teachers' self-images. Instead of being authority figures, who provide answers for all questions, they become resource persons. Rather than pouring information into passive vessels, they orchestrate group discussions. Once again the French have a word for such teachers — ***animateurs*** — who provoke and guide questioning and investigation. Instead of lecturing, they prefer the Socratic method of questioning. Their favorite materials are student-centered and open-ended, with outcomes not preconceived. They see themselves as structuring the kind of learning situations where students arrive at insight and comprehension through self-activity. In Marshall McLuhan's terminology, they are cool rather than hot media, making students, rather than themselves, the focus of attention.

There are risks involved in such an approach. Concern for orthodoxy and proper understanding make most of us more comfortable with more authoritarian approaches. Indoctrination looks safer, and in the short run, it is more orderly and predictable. But in the long run, it works for fewer and fewer people, because essentially it prepares them to march in a parade. Parades are fine if you like to follow instructions and just want to keep in step with the crowd. There was a time when most Catholics marched in step without asking questions, but that time is long gone. Until it returns, if ever, people are going to need help in finding their own way. Adolescence is a good time for questioning, for learning to deal with pluralism.

Not only are teachers' self-perceptions affected by the questioning type of approach, but also the size and shape of the classes. Large numbers of students cannot engage in the kind of dialogue we have been describing. Discussions become fragmented and diffuse, and frustration sets in when more students want to speak than can be heard. Smaller groups, sitting not in rows, but in circles or semicircles, can communicate more effectively with one another. When students look at faces instead of backs of heads, they are more likely to give attention to one another instead of just the teacher. Smaller groups also are less intimidating for students who are less confident. Stating an opinion in a gathering of 15 or 20 requires much less courage than doing so before 35 or 40.

While dedicated, generous teachers can cope with larger classes and manage to do some good things for some of their students, the setup is not conducive to learning. Instead of structures serving teachers and students, the latter are being sacrificed to inflexible arrangements. This may sound very doctrinaire, but it is dishonest to speak of individual attention, dialogic interaction, cooperative learning, and group reflection in crowded classrooms where teachers and students, literally and figuratively, get in one another's way.

Teachers who cannot obtain relief from large classes will have to do a great deal of adaptation to implement some of the ideas and methods we have been proposing. The teacher's ingenuity and energy will go only so far when external factors severely limit efforts to create an effective learning environment.

A Delicate Balance

Those who try to teach in the ways we have described should strike a delicate balance in the way they interact with students. On the one hand, they must give them intellectual elbow room, showing respect for differing opinions and dissent, not hurrying the process of reflection or imposing consensus. On the other hand, they must exercise responsible leadership by clearly standing for something; otherwise they may leave some students with the impression that religion is all a matter of opinion and that one opinion is as good as another. This tension is real and should be acknowledged and accepted. Trying to eliminate the tension will result either in an authoritarian atmosphere, where students hesitate to state their honest thoughts and feelings, or in a bland milieu where no one seems to stand for much of anything.

One carefully-designed method of religious education that has helped many to achieve the goals described above is called "Shared Praxis." As proposed by Thomas Groom,[8] it is a dynamic combination of theory and practice that works not only for religion teachers, but also for those engaged in all other facets of ministry of the word. Here, in brief, are the five steps that make up the process:

Step 1. ***Present Action.*** Participants describe their present action relative to the topic in question. The latter may be a doctrine, a sacrament, an issue of individual or social justice, etc. For example, how do they act with respect to the Eucharist?

Step 2. ***Individual Story and Vision.*** Participants critically remember and retell their personal and social stories. Why do they act as they do, and what are the likely consequences of their action?

Step 3. ***Christian Community Story and Vision.*** The teacher or facilitator retells the Christian community story in regard to the topic, giving an historical overview, the official teaching of the church, and the present state of the question among theologians.

Step 4. ***Dialectic Between the Community and Individual Stories.*** The participants consider their own experience in light of the community's story, and the community's story in light of their individual and group experience. For example, what does church tradition and teaching say to my (our) approach to Eucharist? What does my (our) experience of Eucharist say to church teaching?

Step 5. ***Decision for Future Action.*** In light of the vision of God's kingdom, participants ask how their present action is creative or non-creative of that vision, and how they will act in the future.

Even this very brief summary of the shared praxis method reveals an approach that is experience-centered, critically reflective, and oriented toward action. The role of church teaching and tradition is not minimized, but presented in dialectic with individual and group experience. As Groome points out, the sequence of steps

is flexible rather than rigid. Indeed, shared praxis is not so much a method as an attitude and style of teaching.[9]

Many variations and adaptations of this method are possible. Indeed, many teachers will recognize in its description, elements of their own instructional style. What is common to all these approaches is attention to both process and content, a respect for experience, fidelity to tradition, and a willingness to engage students in ways that are not always easy to control. They are not the only ways to teach, but they reflect the styles of most competent religious educators and offer the best chance of success.

Summary

1. Effective teaching includes motivation to learn, attention to content, and qualities of style that make learning attractive and stimulating.

2. Students can be bored and teachers can be boring, but the subject itself cannot be blamed.

3. Teaching methods which stress discovery, interaction, and reflection rather than indoctrination have built-in risks, but are more effective in the long run.

4. The size and shape of classes significantly affect the styles of teaching that are possible.

5. Religion teachers must aim at a balance of respect for pluralism and dissent with a concomitant stance of leadership and commitment.

7. MATERIALS

The choice of textbooks and other course materials greatly influences the effectiveness of teaching and learning. So does the manner in which these resources are used. In this chapter, we will consider a range of materials available and appropriate for religion teaching. Each teacher will learn what is most effective by trying a variety of materials.

Textbooks are the most commonly-used teaching materials, and with good reason. They provide the student with a definite range of subject matter and a ready-at-hand instrument for study. When the school has a well-constructed religion curriculum with clearly-defined goals and objectives for each year and a discernible sequence of topics to be covered, the textbook contributes to a consistency of treatment that is usually desirable. Thus the teacher will have a good idea of what has been taught previously and what will be taught in the future. Although too much homogeneity can be deadening, especially in a school with highly motivated and talented students, more learning takes place when each class year has distinctive subject matter, with books to match. In such a situation, the course content is dictated not by what the teacher likes to teach, but by what the students are supposed to learn at that stage. Also, there is less likelihood that students will study the same few topics with different teachers and miss out on important matters that no one wanted to teach.

Two problems in dealing with textbooks are: how to choose a text; and how to use a text.

Textbooks

Textbooks should be chosen for the accuracy of their information and for the competence with which they treat the subject matter. They should be adapted to the age and capacity of the students, and should help to motivate the reader to learn. They should challenge without discouraging, and

should not only propose tasks, but also offer help to carry them out. They should be attractive and up-to-date, able to enlist the interest and respect of young readers. As much as possible, they should encourage not passivity, but initiative by the way they delineate issues and open up investigation and discussion.

When assigned to use a textbook, the teacher should, of course, master the book so as to be able to guide the students through it. Generally speaking, the more informed and experienced the teacher, the less likely that the text will be satisfactory. Conversely, the less a teacher knows about the subject, the more dependent he or she will be on the text. Inexperienced teachers should stick fairly closely to the textbook until they gain a degree of competence that will enable them to strike out on their own. But, it is never too early to seek complementary materials to supplement the approach of the basic text and enhance the course as a whole. As teachers gain experience and confidence, they may become more eclectic in their use of the text. They may find materials that cover some of the topics more effectively and that are more compatible with their own teaching styles. In general, the textbook should be the teacher's servant, not the master.

Most textbooks come with teacher's guides, setting out the author's philosophy and suggesting ways to use the book more effectively. The teacher should be acquainted with the content of these guides and make use of the help offered there. Many of them are thicker than the student text and offer more suggestions than most teachers will want to implement. Again, the teacher should be selective and use those resources and strategies that fit his or her own abilities and the students' needs.

Those students, and sometimes whole classes, who are capable of going beyond the assigned textbook in their study of a subject, should be encouraged to use and master readings from other books and periodicals, and in the process, to make use of the library. The goal is not just to have the student master a textbook but to master a subject, and to develop the student's abilities to the maximum.

Sometimes a subject is in such a state of rapid change that textbooks may not be available or may not, all by themselves, adequately keep up with developments in the field. Two examples that come to mind are medical-moral questions and contemporary issues in the church. (These are not basic courses, but the kinds of electives or special study opportunities that enrich the curriculum.) In such cases, some experienced teachers use periodicals and collections of magazine and newspaper articles, as they become available and rele-

vant. Besides keeping up with developments in the subject, students gain experience in learning "on the go," and come to realize that many disciplines are not static, but subject to rapid evolution.

As pointed out earlier, satisfaction with textbooks often diminishes as a teacher gains experience and skill. Some prefer to make their own collections of readings and use them instead of a standard text. While this involves additional work for the teacher, it sometimes is the most effective approach for a particular teacher and group of students.

Audiovisuals

Printed materials will always be the staple resources, but they need not be the whole show. In fact, in today's multimedia world, it is hard to justify such an approach.

Videotapes and films are among the most effective teaching tools, when carefully selected and properly used. Full-length 16mm films are expensive, but the short (15-to-30 minute) films, produced by such companies as Paulist Productions, Teleketics, and Wombat, are much more reasonably priced and more appropriate for the time frames available in school teaching schedules. Many of these films also are available in even less expensive videocassette format, which is easier to present. A religion department does not need a very large budget to add a few videotapes each year to build up an effective audiovisual library. The department chairperson should be on the mailing list of the companies who produce educational films and videos.

Filmstrips and slides also should be considered by the teacher who seeks to enhance learning. Since these media are more static than videos and films, they should be chosen with care. Unless they are extremely well done, they will not interest youngsters who are used to fast-paced movement.

Visuals are not the only alternative to print media. Records and tapes appeal to the ear; music is probably the best audio medium for teaching. Commercials, whether audio, or AV or print, often can serve to make a point effectively.

The monotony of routine can be broken in other ways as well. Field trips take the student into the wider world, and guest speakers bring that world to the students. Sometimes students themselves generate teaching materials. For example, surveys of class members or of the entire student body on religious or moral questions are excellent starting points for group discussions. Statements written

by students, reproduced without prejudice to privacy, can spark spirited exchanges and provoke further study.

A great many different teaching tools are available to the imaginative and creative teacher. Variety is not an end in itself, but even superior students appreciate a bit from time to time. And, sometimes the less conventional medium is simply the most effective vehicle for teaching a particular unit. At any rate, each teacher has to find a style and the combination of materials that helps him or her to function most effectively, and be open to growth, to new ideas, and to new ways.

Summary

1. A variety of teaching materials and resources is available to teachers who can often enhance their instruction by making judicious use of them.

2. Textbooks play a limited, but important role in the teaching of most courses. As long as they are not followed slavishly or uncritically, textbooks can contribute to a well-organized curriculum and valuable learning experiences.

3. Other print materials, audiovisuals, speakers and field trips offer opportunities for variety and enrichment.

8. ASSESSMENT

Whatever one's educational philosophy, whatever the teaching style, however bright or slow or inquisitive or apathetic our classes, sooner or later we come to what some students consider the bottom line: we must give marks. In our minds, this is probably one of the least important aspects of our work. What really matters is how our students have grown, what they learned, and how it will affect their lives. To many students, the mark is important and besides, this is a school, and report cards have to be filled out. So, it's time to turn in our grades. How will we assess our students' achievements?

Before offering some suggestions on how to evaluate performance and assign grades, we should note that for many religion teachers, this presents little or no difficulty, while for others it is a real problem. The latter are uncomfortable with the very notion of assigning marks for religious activity. Let us look at these two groups in some detail. Teachers may find themselves in one of them, or maybe a part of each. Theoretician Graham Rossiter describes them:

> Some religion teachers seek to establish religion as a subject in the curriculum with a status similar to that of other subjects. An emphasis on content, study skills, written work, assignments and assessment suggests that the pedagogy in this approach should be similar to that of other subjects. Such an approach ... concentrates on communicating knowledge and understanding of religion, while at the same time not neglecting the affective dimension and not disregarding the importance of other aspects of religious education outside the formal curriculum (liturgy, retreats, etc.).
>
> By way of contrast, other religion teachers oppose this approach, considering that religion should not be presented as an academic subject. According to this way of

thinking, pupils should perceive religion very differently from other subjects: there should be emphasis on discussion and sharing of faith insights with no written work and assessment. This approach highlights the religion period as a more personal pastoral alternative to the classwork in academic subjects where competition and examination orientation are sometimes believed to be problematic.[10]

It is easy to see why the first group would have no great difficulty assigning marks in religion, while the second group has problems. Clearly, the argument goes beyond the issue of marks to a more philosophical level. Splits like the one described can be found not only among the members of a department, but also even in individual teachers. Where teachers find themselves will affect not only the way they make up grades, but also the way they approach religion teaching itself.

Rossiter himself lines up with the first group. He criticizes his opponents for trying to do catechesis in an inappropriate setting. Catechesis, properly understood, presupposes a group of believers, effectively evangelized, who are willing to develop deeper understanding of and participation in the Christian faith tradition. The students in our classrooms can no longer be thought of as such a homogeneous group. "What might be a healthy sharing and commending of faith insights in a voluntary group setting could be perceived as presuming too much or applying moral pressure if attempted in the compulsory classroom."[11] He recommends disassociating religious education from catechesis, in order to achieve clarity of purpose, set realistic goals, and avoid courting frustration and resentment.

Not everyone wants to go as far as Rossiter. Some feel that he limits religion teachers to teaching *about* religion and thus prevents them from reaching the student as a whole person. Whichever side we take, we must deal with the issue on the level of assessment and grading. On what shall we mark the students?

For those teachers who line up with the second group and prefer a more pastoral orientation, which stresses the devotional and downplays the educational, their efforts to make the subject more pastoral may send out some unintended messages. The students may conclude that religion is somehow less of an educational experience than the study of other subjects, or that it is a totally subjective enterprise, not worthy of serious intellectual attention. Not only will teachers be in trouble with students if they give any low marks, but

they will be hard pressed to justify the decision, not only to students but also to themselves.

Teachers, who resist choosing between these two views of religious instruction and see a bit of themselves in both of them, probably move back and forth between the educational and the devotional, the academic and the pastoral, the objective and the subjective. Perhaps this works, but it then also is wise to separate out these various elements in their teaching, to see which elements lend themselves to formal grading and which do not.

Grading Elements

In addressing this question, a group of religious educators, in a recently published work,[12] distinguish four different aspects of learning: 1) knowledge of material; 2) critical thinking and interaction with the material; 3) individual acceptance of the material as meaningful; and 4) actual incorporation into one's personal life. Religion teachers strive to achieve all four outcomes, and to the extent that they happen or fail to happen, perceive their efforts as successful or failing. Which of these lend themselves to evaluation and grading?

1. ***Knowledge of the material.*** Here we are in the realm of the cognitive, and can speak of the grasp of religious information. This can be formally tested and graded, just as in any other school subject. Some courses are more informational than others. Doctrine, church history, theological questions, and scripture studies contain a good deal of such content whose mastery can be measured. On the other hand, courses in prayer or morality, with their stress on process, may be less amenable to such calculation.

2. ***Critical thinking and interaction with the material.*** This can and should be graded. It is not as objectively measurable as the grasp of information, but a teacher can make a fair judgment of the degree to which the student wrestled with the issues and actively contributed to individual and group learning. Such an assessment is very appropriate in courses which stress processes like discussion, research, and experience.

3. ***Individual acceptance of the material as meaningful.*** This is realization or personal belief. This embraces the subjective as well as the objective realm. It is what the teacher hopes and strives for but cannot make happen without the student's totally free response. It can be elicited and assessed, but should not be formally tested. And, of course, it should not be graded, since this would be a

violation of the student's privacy. Here we are reminded of Rossiter's observation about the compulsory classroom and its limitations as a vehicle for faith sharing.

4. ***Actual incorporation into one's personal life.*** Here we are dealing with transformation, with what may be called religion. Sometimes this can be observed, but only on the external level, and can rarely be verbalized adequately. Neither the presence nor the absence of this incorporation can be legitimately graded. Otherwise, we would be judging not academic performance, but the personal life of the student. There is irony here: the most important outcome of our efforts is the one we are most stringently forbidden to reward or penalize.

Once teachers have clarified for themselves what it is that they are marking and how they arrive at the grades, they should strive not only to be fair, but also to be perceived as fair. Assigning marks is often a potential source of misunderstanding and resentment. To minimize this danger, students should be informed, clearly and explicitly, how they will be graded. This is even more important in courses which stress process than in those that stress content, since the norms for the grading process may not be well defined in the students' minds. They must also be reassured that their grades are not a function of their belief or disbelief, or of their agreement or disagreement with the teacher on controverted questions. For this reason, teachers should be careful in marking exercises — essays or homework papers — which ask for opinions rather than retention or explanation of information. Nothing must be permitted which would damage the atmosphere of honesty and trust that the teacher has built up in the classroom.

Evaluating Performance

In this chapter, we have been using words like grasp and mastery somewhat loosely. When evaluating students' performance, it is well to distinguish different degrees of learning. There is passive retention, whereby the student can recognize the right answer (e.g. in a multiple choice test) or follow the line of reasoning in a teacher's presentation or understand a piece of writing. Then there is active retention, in which the student can recall what is demanded. This active grasp, which is a superior degree of learning, is demonstrated by the ability to express oneself, to verbalize both by the spoken and the written word. These degrees of skill are important when we remember that the goal

of Catholic education is to turn out graduates who are not only well-informed and discriminating, but also articulate and capable of communication and leadership. Religion teachers probably cannot expect this of all students, but they should certainly give recognition and encouragement to those who seem to be on the way to achieving it.

Finally, assessment need not be a one-way street. Just as teachers help students by evaluating their work and pointing out their achievements and shortcomings, so also students can help teachers by offering constructive criticism of their work. Administrators can supply specially constructed forms which enable students, anonymously, to offer positive as well as negative observations. These evaluation instruments touch on such items as command of subject, organization, clarity of presentation, ability to sustain interest, fairness, and relationships with students. Some teachers find this process threatening, and indeed, it is sometimes humbling. But, it can also be encouraging and even surprising. There is no better way to find out how one is really doing in the classroom. It is highly recommended to all teachers, from novices to veterans. It's never too early or too late to learn.

Summary

1. Different philosophies of religion teaching produce different attitudes toward assigning grades.

2. Knowledge of material and critical thinking and interaction can and should be graded, but not personal belief and incorporation into one's life.

3. In evaluating student performance, different levels of learning should be considered, from passive recognition to active mastery and articulate expression.

9. OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

Every job, every profession has its occupational hazards — ailments to which its practitioners are peculiarly prone. Religion teaching is no exception. Anyone brave or idealistic enough to attempt religious instruction in high school soon learns that while the rewards and satisfactions can be high, so can the costs from time to time. These go beyond the hard work, dedication, and drudgery that accompany almost any kind of teaching at this level. They may involve tension, frustration, and guilt that sap energy, drain enthusiasm, and sometimes lead to burnout.

The hazards are unavoidable, even by the most gifted, balanced, tactful teachers. However, teachers can forestall some of these hazards or lessen their impact if they refrain from unrealistic expectations, avoid creating their own difficulties, and put problems and failures in perspective.

Tension

Adolescence is a volatile period in most people's lives. Alienation and rebellion are part of the territory, so anyone who works with teenagers should expect to encounter some occasional hostility as they work their way through the minefield called "Growing Up." Not surprisingly, religion class sometimes serves as a lightning rod for resentment and discontent. Unlike most other disciplines, which have little or no emotional content, and ordinarily provoke nothing more confrontational than a clash of ideas or opinions, religion class can constitute what psychologists call a threatening situation. Allegiances, values, world views, lifestyles, habits, and emotional investments are at risk when groups deal with religious and moral issues.

Religion and church are considered by some adolescents to be

rule makers, which try to limit their freedom and induce guilt. The area of sexuality is perhaps the most obvious example, but not the only one. Students may perceive the teacher as an authority figure, part of the adult conspiracy of restraint, and act out unpleasantly. But, teachers should not take it personally because they are probably just convenient targets for youngsters' hostility. While sensitive teachers may take conflicts home with them and nurse their wounds through the night, their students are much less likely to do so. Teachers should try to grow a thick skin because they will need it.

Tension also may arise from the fact that teachers are trying to walk a thin line between two extremes. On the one hand, if they push ideas and values too hard, it may arouse legitimate resentment. Indoctrination and pressure to conform are temptations for some adults who take too seriously their responsibility for student behaviors. On the other hand, teachers don't want to be bland. They want to make a difference in their students' lives. The ability to be challenging and demanding, without being authoritarian and violating students' rights to self-determination does not come easily.

Another source of teacher-student tension is the peculiar character of the religion class in a school setting. Most teachers want to create an environment where students feel free to speak their mind, to agree or disagree, to interact without constraint. This is certainly the proper milieu for religious discourse, but certain factors make it difficult to achieve. Students have not freely chosen to be part of this group under this teacher's direction; they have been assigned to it. The teacher will grade them, so students wonder: "Should I say what I think, or what I think the teacher wants to hear? Will disagreement be penalized?" Chapter 6 includes some suggestions for dealing with this difficulty, but for some students it may remain a problem no matter what approach is used.

Theoreticians debate about the kind of instruction that is appropriate for the compulsory classroom. Some think that required faith-sharing, which reaches a personal level, is out of place in an academic setting. Although many disagree, it cannot be denied that the faith-sharing approach is a potential source of tension since some students may consider it an invasion of privacy. Whichever position teachers take, they must be alert to the possibility of misunderstanding.

Frustration

One frustration that teachers of all subjects experience is the student, who is not interested and does not want to learn. Like the poor, they will always be with us. Even as teachers try to arouse students' curiosity and spark their interest, they should try to understand the reasons for their lack of motivation. Some have already been pointed out: secularization, with its narrowing of focus and relegating to irrelevance any questions of larger meaning; immersion in a culture hostile to some Christian values; adolescent rebellion against any idea or institution which threatens to limit freedom. For these reasons and others, the religion teacher will, from time to time, feel like a refrigerator salesman at the north pole. Patience, understanding, and ingenuity are needed in large quantities.

Another reason for frustration is not so much student disinterest, but misinformation. It is depressing to hear students give voice to versions of Catholicism that are simplistic, crude, and just plain wrong. And the teacher wonders: "Where do they get these ideas? Why am I always doing repair work? How can they learn anything when they have so much to unlearn?" There is more than one reason for this discouraging state of affairs. Religion is primarily an adult enterprise, which loses something in the translation for youngsters. Distinctions and nuances are lost on younger learners. Now that they are older, with new cognitive abilities, it is up to the teacher to refine the students' understanding. But, since these students are still not adults, some refinements will elude even the more intelligent, since they lack the maturity to appreciate them. The treatment of religious issues in the public media does not always help, either. Some journalists collapse all distinctions into simplistic categories like liberal-vs.-conservative, that obscure rather than enlighten. Finally, some youngsters are simply victims of poor teaching. Their previous teachers presumably did their best, but their best is not always good enough. Let's not be too hard on them or on ourselves. We live in a time when passing on the faith is not easy, and when the efforts even of skilled and dedicated teachers can be undone by a host of factors in students' families and neighborhoods and even within the students themselves.

Guilt

Religion teachers, like teachers of other subjects, experience failure from time to time. But, for the religion teacher, failure brings not only discouragement and depression, but also guilt. They carry this burden because students' spiritual welfare is involved. When young people reject faith, drop out of church, or refuse to share one's convictions and values, the teacher may feel a guilt akin to that which afflicts the parents of these religious and moral dropouts. There is an unspoken premise on which most of the teacher's guilt is based. Just as their parents want to ask, "What did we do wrong?" the teacher also may ask, "How did I teach them wrong?" What the teacher is saying implicitly is something like: "If I were a better teacher, my students would believe in God, accept Christ, go to church, and embrace the Christian values and the moral behaviors that go with them." The foolishness of this statement is apparent simply by saying it aloud.

Religious education is just one of many influences in a young person's life. If there is a basic receptivity to religious beliefs and values, a good deal can be accomplished, and then religion teaching can be a very rewarding profession. But, Jesus' parable of the sower is much to the point here: when the seed falls on rocks or roadway or thorns, don't blame the sower for the poor crop. Citing this parable should not encourage teachers to refuse responsibility or to blame others for their own shortcomings; it is simply a reminder that they must not have unrealistic expectations about their ability toconvert people, lest they punish themselves unfairly. Otherwise, the next steps may be discouragement and burnout, and the loss of another good worker in the Lord's vineyard.

Guilt over student behavior sometimes comes from other adults in the community. Although this probably doesn't happen as often as it used to, there are some parents of religious dropouts, who try to put the blame on teachers for what their children are taught (or not taught) in school. They may be the ones with unrealistic expectations if they thought that enrollment in a Catholic school was some kind of guarantee of religious belief and practice. Or, the finger pointers may be the teacher's colleagues on the faculty. There are still some schools, with cultural lags, where educators think of the religion department as being responsible, all by itself, for religious and moral formation of the student body. They still do not understand that religious education is only one facet of total

youth ministry, which includes campus ministry, service programs, and indeed the encouragement and involvement of all or most faculty members and administrators. Religion teachers who are doing their best and failing to fulfill unreasonable expectations, due to factors beyond their control, should not allow themselves to take on such guilt, which stems from a very limited grasp of what goes into effective ministry to youth.

The Big Picture

The occupational hazards described usually involve, to some degree, a tendency of teachers to take themselves and their mission too seriously. It is all well and good to place a high value on one's work and to take satisfaction in the real contributions teachers make to young people's growth. And, while teachers should certainly hold themselves to high standards of performance, they should take care not to exaggerate the importance of their role. As stated above, the teacher is but one of many influences in students' lives, and probably not near the top of the list. Once teachers have done their best, they should leave the rest to the student and to God. The results, after all, are up to them. Not only do teachers have no idea of how the story will turn out, but they also really don't know how the story is developing. They can interpret behavior, but only God can read hearts. Some of the teenagers that teachers most worry about may be in much better spiritual condition than they think.

Most religion teachers are idealistic people who care about their students and want very much to enrich their lives. That's a beautiful combination of qualities, but it also is the prescription for a potentially vulnerable person. The prevention or the cure for tension, frustration, and guilt lies not in diminishing idealism or denying vulnerability, but in keeping a sense of balance and perspective. There are no guarantees that one will never be hurt, but they will help one heal faster, last longer, and do a lot more good.

Summary

1. Taking responsibility for the religious education of teens makes teachers vulnerable to tension, frustration, and guilt.

2. These occupational hazards arise from many causes beyond the teacher's control. They include the experience of adolescence, the countercultural character of Christianity, religious illiteracy, and unrealistic expectations on the part of teachers and other adults.

3. Religion teachers can deal with pressures by accepting the limited nature of their role in students' lives, thus keeping failures and successes in proper perspective.

10. DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Let's take one more look at the young people we try to teach in religion class. We have already said a great deal about them — their world, their values, their hopes and fears. Is there a way of looking at them and relating to them that could bring some kind of unity to our many impressions and help us to focus our efforts and concerns?

Developmental theory, which looks at persons not as static beings, but as engaged in a process of growth, offers helpful insights into the hearts and minds of the adolescents teachers deal with every school day. It asks: How do people grow and learn? What are the changes taking place in our students which affect their hearing of what we say? Are there any predictable passages, any universal experiences through which each unique person must pass? Are there attitudes toward religious faith and moral concerns that are peculiar to the adolescent? And if so, are there any strategies of response that would have universal validity?

There are many developmentalists with many different approaches to human growth. The popularity of their theories waxes and wanes from time to time. Nevertheless, when used with discretion, they can be of genuine assistance.

> The behavioral sciences ... help us understand how people grow in their capacity for responding in faith to God's grace. They can, therefore, make a significant contribution to catechesis. At the same time, catechists should not be uncritical in their approach to these sciences ... (and) should not imagine that any one school or theory has all the answers. Finally, behavioral sciences do not supply the doctrinal and moral content of catechetical programs. Their discoveries and developments must be constantly and carefully evaluated by competent persons before being integrated into catechetics.[13]

With these precautions in mind, some observations that are general enough to earn consensus, but practical enough to be of value can be made. The evolution of cognitive and affective capacities in the child and the young person are determining factors in what they can absorb on the intellectual and emotional levels. We have always known this, but it is only in recent decades that observation has been refined and strategies elaborated to capitalize on what we know. Thus, we have always tailored language to the age of children, reserving abstract and universal ideas for later, and in motivating them, we have recognized that young children can hardly respond to appeals to altruism. The impact of cognitive and affective development on the quality of faith and on the capacity for moral judgment and decision-making is a matter of great importance to the religious educator. Our task is not to become amateur psychologists, but to be more sophisticated in assessing student capabilities and behavior and in choosing teaching materials and strategies.

Earlier, we briefly discussed the ways in which adolescents tend to make judgments of right and wrong, and we suggested strategies for encouraging movement to more mature levels of moral analysis.[14] Ninth and tenth graders should be emerging from a kind of pre-moral phase in which right and wrong are calculated purely in terms of reward and punishment. During the high school years most of them can move through what some developmentalists call the "good boy/good girl" stage in which morality and immorality are synonymous with the approval or disapproval of significant others, toward a stage at which the norm is the needs or expectations of the wider community (conventional morality). Many middle and older adolescents can also begin to appreciate and admire, if not totally understand, models of moral behavior based on universal principles.

On the cognitive level, these passages depend on the growing capacity for abstract thinking, which usually increases significantly in the teen years. As we have pointed out, structuring discussions in the Socratic mode to create cognitive dissonance can help promote movement to more mature levels of judgment. A few qualifications are in order here. First, according to developmental theory, people can usually ***understand*** moral reasoning at a level somewhat higher than that at which they operate. Thus, most teenagers can grasp the viewpoint of conventional morality even while they habitually operate from the more narrow foci of self-interest and peer group concerns. Second, movement to more mature levels of judgment cannot be rushed; youngsters need time

and experience at different levels before they are ready to move on. Finally, as Craig Dykstra reminds us, the moral agent is more than just a thinking person.[16] The classroom is a good vehicle for addressing the cognitive aspects of moral development, but the growth of the whole person, especially the crucial affective dimension, takes place elsewhere. Religion teachers can make a significant, but limited contribution.

Not only in moral matters, but in those that touch on faith, we must also attend to developmental concerns, for young people face tasks of growth not only in the way they make judgments of right and wrong, but also in the stance they take toward religious faith. Our eventual goal should be a mature adult who takes responsibility for his or her religious identity. One of the most impressive examples of such autonomy was the late Frank Sheed, an engaging and persuasive Catholic apologist. Once, after a talk to a gathering of physicians, a doctor observed that, while the talk was interesting, Sheed's beliefs could be accounted for by the fact that he had been brought up to think as a Catholic, while he, the doctor, had been raised as an agnostic. Sheed responded with a little personal history: his father was an atheist, and his mother was a Protestant! So much for brainwashing. Many of our students think that they and their peers are all programmed to be what they are. We cannot expect them to exhibit a great deal of independence at this age, but we can provide experiences which will promote such outcomes later on. The suggestions we made earlier for stimulating the asking of religious questions and for dealing with questions of religious authority and conscience can help toward this end.

We should not, however, be so intent on these processes that we fail to give proper consideration to content. Youngsters need a more than rudimentary knowledge of what this faith is about, or their critical thinking will take place in a vacuum of ignorance. Autonomy without religious literacy leads to the kind of religious subjectivism that we are trying to avoid. This point about content shows the limitations of the developmental perspective; i.e., it is not the only important consideration. There should be a kind of rhythm in high school religion classes, moving from content to process and back again, as students absorb information even while learning to process it in more and more sophisticated ways. The teacher's function is to orchestrate this rhythm, never settling for the mere uncritical accumulation of information, but also making sure that critical thinking is exercised by students who know what they are talking about.

* * *

At the beginning of this book we met Sheila, a young woman who was looking for answers to life's biggest questions. In religious terms, her approach was typically American, inasmuch as it ignored tradition and community and looked for truth solely in an isolated, rootless self. As we pointed out, there is much of Sheila in many of our students who, left to themselves, might settle for a lonely religious identity without much form or substance. Indeed, some of them, caught up in the unreflective strivings of a secularized consumer culture, might settle for even less. They might not even face the questions that Sheila cares enough to ask.

Catholic schools have much to offer these young people, including the opportunity to learn of and identify with a venerable religious and moral tradition. If, as religion teachers, we can put them in touch with this tradition in a dynamic, challenging way, we help them not only to hear God's call, but also to deal with the most basic task of adolescence, the search for identity. Teaching of the kind we have described in these pages allows them to accomplish something that many people never do — to choose their own lives. It poses questions of morality, values, and larger meaning that are ignored by those who take a purely instrumental approach to education. In a world where young people are targeted by manipulative forces that try to capitalize on their vulnerability, the religious educator offers them opportunities to reflect, to evaluate, and to make genuinely free choices. This is what happened to people who met and listened to Jesus. Even as he took their workaday experiences and concerns seriously, he encouraged them to get beneath the surface and to see God working in their world. He unmasked hypocrisy, called sin by its name, and showed those with open minds and hearts how much better they could be. This is a sublime calling, to pass on to young people the message of Christ, and, with his help, to bring out the best in those we serve.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart,* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 221.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 228.
3. Edward Braxton, "Catholic Students and Secular Universities," *America*. (April 28, 1984), pp. 316-17.
4. *Sharing the Light of Faith,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1979), pp. 47-63.
5. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 20.
6. Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, *Documents of Vatican II,* (New York: America Press, 1966), pp. 639-640.
7. Bellah et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 139.
8. Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 184-201.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 224
10. Graham Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce' Between Catechesis and Religious Education in Catholic Schools," *Religious Education*. (January-February 1982), pp. 21-40.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
12. Commission on Religious Education, *Teaching for the Kingdom,* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Secondary Education Association, 1987).
13. *Sharing the Light of Faith, op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
14. *Ibid.*, chapter 3.
15. Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character,* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 7-29.

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